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CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA: SOCIAL ISSUES AND REGIONAL DIVERGENCES

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Abstract: *Paper aims at investigation of contemporary approaches to sustainable rural development in Russia. It includes the overview of current experiences in rural development, analysis of major economic and social indicators of rural areas in comparison with urban ones. Analysis included the set of indicators such as number of rural people, number of rural settlements, rates of births and mortalities, natural and migration increases and declines of population, rates of employment and unemployment, average monthly nominal per capita wages, and level of the subsistence minimum. Indicators have been measured separately for rural and urban areas; regions have been grouped in relation to the particular indicator. The research is concluded by discovery of growth points for rural development and a set of recommendations on perspective measures of state and local policies in rural areas, directed on increase of living standards of rural population and retention of labour resources in their traditional rural areas of inhabitation.*

Keywords: *sustainable rural development, region, rural areas, income level, employment, diversification, urban agglomeration* (JEL: *Q18, P25*)

Introduction

Rural development, aimed at improvement of quality of life, is the key factor of sustainable growth of agricultural production effectiveness, as well as social stability in rural areas. Agriculture, as the primary industry in rural areas, is the major (and often the only one) source of employment and income for rural people. It directly influences economic, social, and demographic processes in rural territories, affects land settlement and reclamation, and ensures maintenance of territorial and cultural integrity of the country (Ivolga, Uryadova, 2010). Consequently, state policy in the sphere of agriculture should be proceeded from sustainable development of rural areas, based on economic, social, and environmental approaches.

Over 1990-2000s there were certain reforms implemented in agricultural production and land relations in Russia, including the rural development. Those reforms let to stabilize situation in rural areas during transition period. However, current conditions of economic development require new approaches to rural areas in order to ensure their economic, social and environmental sustainability. Rural areas lag behind urban ones in terms of living standards and quality of life. Gaps in infrastructural development between rural and urban (even suburban) areas are continuing to grow. Number of rural settlements goes down because of huge migration outflow from rural areas to cities. Migration brings together ageing of population, lack of labour of high qualification, degradation of population, growing social tensions, abandonment of rural settlements and agricultural lands, lowering effectiveness of agricultural production, and growing environmental load because of outdated machineries and low culture of farming.

That is especially relevant for areas contiguous to big cities. On the face of it, such predominantly non-rural areas are in the better position in comparison to the rural ones, since the major economic indicators (income level, labour inflows, employment rates, etc.) are higher. However, that is primarily because of employment opportunities in the spheres, not related to agriculture (trade, services, etc.) or commuting of people from surrounding rural settlements to urban centres. In such a situation sustainable development of traditional agricultural production and rural way of life is even in a bigger danger, despite the higher attractiveness of those “pseudo-rural” areas.

Material and Methods

There are various approaches to understanding sustainable development. UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) recognises sustainable development as a one, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

The essence of sustainable development is to harmonise ecological, social and economic interests of present and future generations, and as such, it is very applicable to rural areas. International practices and success stories in the sphere of rural development are studied in the works of W. Heijman (regional competitiveness and regional issues of economic development), (Heijman, Schipper, 2010; Heide, Heijman, 2012; Bronisz et al., 2008), J. Andrei (cases of Eastern Europe in general and Romania in particular), (Erokhin, Ivolga, Andrei et al., 2014) and D. Cvijanovic and P. Vuković (investigations of perspectives of rural tourism in separate localities of Serbia and other Danube countries) (Cvijanovic, Vukovic, 2012).

Mannion (1996) emphasises two approaches to sustainable rural development. The first is a top-down approach, when various programs of rural development are initiated by the governmental bodies. The second is a bottom-up approach that involves an active engagement of local communities in decision-making, development and implementation of strategies for sustainable rural development. Therefore, for the purposes of the current research we have primarily addressed the works, related to analysis of local characteristics of rural development and unique economic, social and environmental features of certain regions.

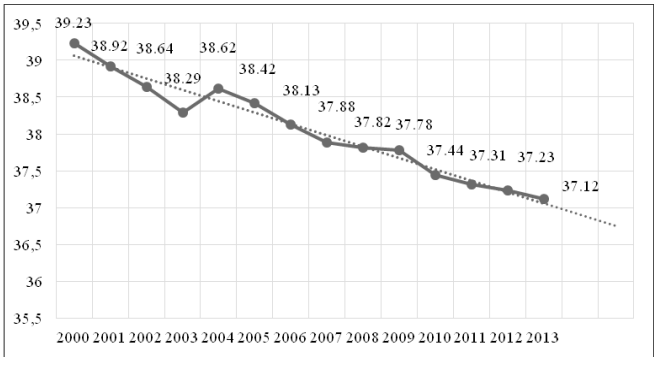
The research of contemporary issues of sustainable rural development was conducted on the case of Russia. Such authors as Merzlov et al. (2012), Rusinova (2011), Lavrukhina (2013), Vuković et al. (2012) discuss how to successfully manage rural development on the case of economies in transition, including Russia. In relation to Russia we also studied approaches to sustainable rural development through small and medium entrepreneurship in rural areas and intensification of agricultural production (Bondarenko, 2011; Trukhachev, Lescheva, 2010). The special attention was paid to integration of agricultural producers (Lescheva, 2007; Lescheva, 2008) and diversification of income opportunities in rural areas by means of alternative employments, rural tourism and related activities (Ivolga, Erokhin, 2013; Jelocnik, Ivolga, 2012; Ivolga, Belak, 2013; Kundius, Chermyanina, 2011; Ivolga, Mikhaylova, 2013).

Taking into account the essential differences between various regions of Russia in terms of provision with natural, social and labour resources, development of rural infrastructure, and environmental conditions of agricultural production, we studied all 83 administrative regions of Russia, aggregated into eight federal districts. Assessment was made using the set of seven parameters (number of people, number of rural settlements, rates of births and mortalities, natural and migration increases and declines of population, rates of employment and unemployment, average monthly nominal per capita wages, and level of the subsistence minimum). Based on the results of calculation, 83 regions have been grouped into four types and nine subtypes (each was given its name) depending on the character of rural development, utilization of available agricultural and environmental resources, level of social and demographic development, and threats to sustainable development of rural areas . The map of Russia's regions was developed by the authors and presented as a result of the paper. Also, a classification let authors to discover both common threats to sustainability and regional specifics of rural development.

Results and Discussion

Rural population in Russia accounts 37.1 mln people, which is about 26% of total population. Working-age rural population is 21.4 mln people. There are 153.1 thousand settlements located in rural territories; over 133.7 thousands of them are permanently inhabited. Herein, 73% of rural settlements have less than 200 inhabitants, while settlements with over two thousand residents account only 2% (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014). Since 2000, rural population in Russia decreased by 5.4% (from 39.23 mln people down to 37.12 mln people) (*Figure 1*). The linear trend shows further population decline in 2014-2015 (down to 36.5 mln people by 2015).

Figure 1. Rural population in Russia in 2000-2013, mln people.



Source: Author's calculations based on data of State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014

In terms of the regions of Russia, the most essential rural population decline was observed in North-West and Siberian federal districts (NWFD and SibFD correspondingly). Share of NWFD in overall rural population of Russia decreased from 6.5% in 2000 down to 6.0% in 2013, share of SibFD decreased from 15.1% down to 14.3% correspondingly.

Despite the serious structural changes, economic and social conditions of rural areas in Russia remain complex. Levels of unemployment and poverty are two times higher in comparison to urban areas; while rural labour compensations are two times lower than the ones in other industries. Because of lower living standards, existing infrastructural problems and high unemployment people migrate to urban areas (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of rural inhabitants in Russia in 2000-2013, thousand people.

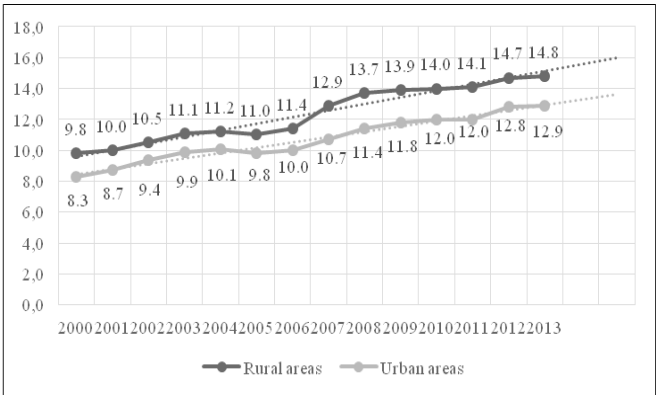
Years	Population, beginning of the year	Variation (+, -):				Population, end of the year
		gross increase	including:			
			natural increase	migration increase	territorial transformations	
2000	39470.6	-238.7	-274.2	-2.6	38.1	39231.9
2001	39231.9	-307.9	-271.7	-51.9	15.7	38924.0
2002	38924.0	-281.6	-281.9	-26.7	27.0	38642.4
2003	38642.4	-348.3	-281.5	-90.5	23.7	38294.1
2004	38294.1	324.8	-260.3	-108.8	693.9	38618.9
2005	38618.9	-200.9	-287.6	-117.4	204.1	38418.0
2006	38418.0	-287.0	-230.4	-109.0	52.4	38131.0
2007	38131.0	-248.6	-145.7	-50.9	-52.0	37882.4
2008	37882.4	-60.7	-113.3	-60.6	113.2	37821.7
2009	37821.7	-49.6	-88.9	-47.8	87.1	37772.1
2010	37772.1	-327.9	-81.7	-228.8	-17.4	37444.2
2011	37444.2	-129.8	-42.5	-149.9	62.6	37314.4
2012	37314.4	-85.6	-6.3	-166.6	87.3	37228.8
2013	37228.8	-110.6	-0.8	-176.8	67.0	37118.2

Source: State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014.

Number of rural settlements in 2010 (the latest census) decreased on 9.2 thousand in comparison to 1989, while the number of depopulated rural settlements increased from 9.4 thousand up to 19.4 thousand. According to the All-Russian research institute of rural economy (VNIIESH), over one third of rural people consider an opportunity to leave rural areas in favour of cities. Among young people that share is even bigger – up to a half (Bondarenko, 2011).

Migration outflow is the major reason of depopulation of rural territories in Russia. Despite the certain natural increase (*Figure 2*), social and economic components dominate over the natural one.

Figure 2. Crude birth rate indexes for rural and urban areas of Russia in 2000-2013, permille.



Source: Author's development based on (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014)

That is not exclusively Russia's situation. Similar processes are observed in other countries. For example, USA and EU countries lose up to 5% of their rural population within 3-5 years (Lavrukhina, 2013). Low prestige of rural life, high risks of agricultural production, and poor perspectives of rural activities in terms of career development and income lead to migration of people from rural areas worldwide.

Over the last 14 years the number of rural inhabitants in Russia decreased on 2.4 mln people, whilst losses because of natural and migration factors were 3.8 mln people. Population decline was mainly caused by excess of mortality over fertility (63%). Activation of demographic policy in recent years decreased natural decline in the population. However, migration outflow grew substantially and became the main reason of depopulation in rural areas.

Nowadays problem of depopulation is the most severe in Kostromskaya, Tverskaya, Yaroslavskaya, Vologodskaya, Pskovskaya, Kirovskaya, and Magadanskaya oblasts. Over one fifth of rural settlements in those regions is depopulated and deserted (Merzlov et al., 2012). Structure of economically active population in rural areas in 2012-2013 was improved; share of unemployed people revised from 9.6% in 2012 down to 8.5% in 2013 (Table 2).

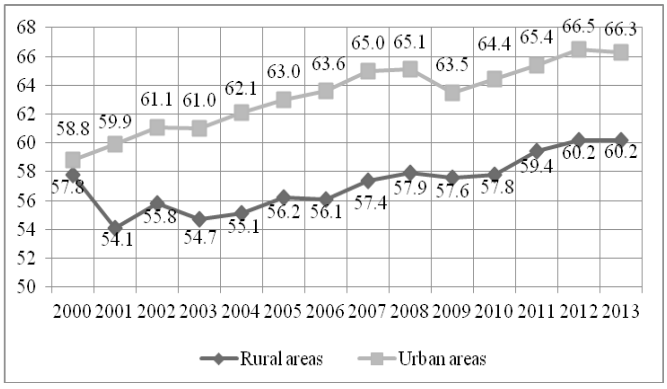
Table 2. Economic activity and employment of rural population in Russia in 2012-2013, thousand people.

Indicator	2012	2013	Variation (+,-)	2013 in comparison to 2012, %
Total population, the 15 to 72 age bracket , thousand people	27524	27524	-	100.0
Economically active population, thousand people	18100	18081	-19	99.9
including:				
employed, thousand people	16561	16579	18	100.1
employed, %	91.5	91.7	0.2	
unemployed, thousand people	1540	1502	-38	95.7
unemployed, %	8.5	8.3	-0.2	
Inactive population, thousand people	9424	9443	19	100.2

Source: State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014.

In 2000-2013 employment in rural areas was essentially lower in comparison to cities. There is an overall growth of employment rate, observed both in rural and urban areas in 2000-2013, however the growth rate for urban areas is threefold bigger, than in the rural ones. Employment rate for urban areas in 2013 gained 7.5 percentage points in comparison with 2000, while the one for rural areas – only 2.4 (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3. Employment levels in rural and urban areas of Russia in 2000-2013, %.



Source: State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014.

Level of employment decreased in North-Caucasus and Privolzhsky federal districts to the utmost. North-Caucasus federal District has the highest unemployment rate – 14.3%. Unemployment levels in rural areas of Siberian and Far East federal districts exceed international standards as well (Table 3).

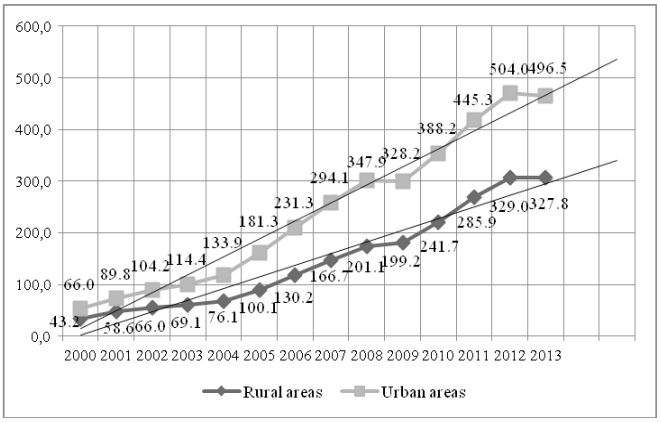
Table 3. Number of unemployed people and overall level of unemployment in rural areas of Russia, average of reference period.

Federal district	Number of unemployed people, thousand people			Level of unemployment, %		
	2012	2013	2013 to 2012, %	2012	2013	Variation (+,-), p.p.
Russia, total	1540	1502	97.5	8.5	8.3	+0.2
Central Federal District	184	190	103.0	5.3	5.4	0.1
North-West Federal District	90	87	96.7	7.9	7.9	0.0
South Federal District	199	203	102.0	8.0	8.2	0.2
North-Caucasus Federal District	354	326	92.1	15.8	14.3	-1.5
Privolzhsky Federal District	281	264	94.0	6.6	6.2	-0.4
Ural Federal District	107	86	80.4	9.1	7.3	-1.8
Siberian Federal District	241	259	107.5	9.5	10.3	0.8
Far East Federal District	84	87	103.6	10.9	11.0	0.1

Source: State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014

Income gap between urban and rural territories is permanent over the referred period of 2000-2013– about 150% (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4. Dynamics of average per capita disposable income in rural and urban areas of Russia in 2000-2013 and liner trends to 2015, euro per month.



** Presented financial numbers are real, inflation is considered (Rosstat, 2014). All financial numbers are calculated in Euro based on average Euro-Ruble ratios for each year.*
Source: Author's development based on (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014; Rosstat, 2012; Rosstat, 2014; Central Bank of the Russian Federation (2014)).

Absolute amounts of per capita disposable incomes had been considered based on data of the State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014, adjusted for inflation (Rosstat, 2014) and recalculated in Euro (Central Bank of the Russian Federation, 2014). Despite its growth over the referred period, income level for rural areas is still very low. The linear trend developed to 2015 hardly reaches €350, while an average disposable income in urban areas is expected to excess €550 in 2015.

Overcoming differences between urban and rural areas in income level in particular and in economic, technological, and social development in general should become the strategic trend of rural policy in Russia. People will migrate back to rural areas from cities only in case they are aware of certain level of income, as well as infrastructure, comparable to urban conditions.

As of today, almost a half of regions in Russia (47%) are not favourable for sustainable rural development. Some of the regions are even considered as depressed ones, with various symptoms of economic downturn and social depression. Those regions concentrate about 64% of rural population of Russia (Merzlov et al., 2012).

Table 4. Average monthly nominal per capita wage in rural areas of Russia*.

Indicator	2000	2012	2013	Variation: 2013 to 2000, %, (+,-), p.p.	Variation: 2013 to 2012, %, (+,-), p.p.
Average national, Euro**	83.35	657.66	706.77	845.92	107.47
Average in agriculture, Euro**	36.93	348.95	368.88	998.86	105.71

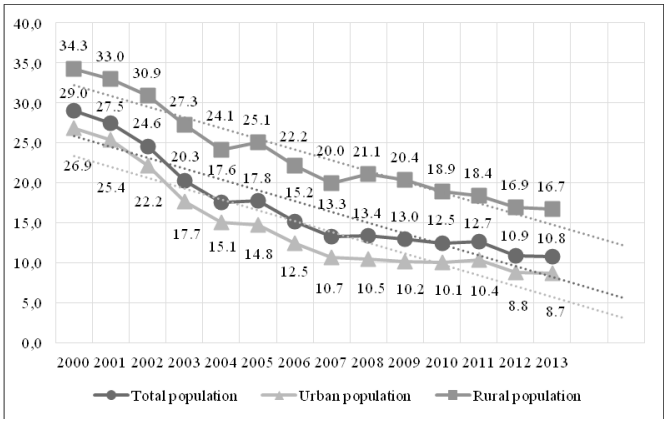
Indicator	2000	2012	2013	Variation: 2013 to 2000, %, (+,-), p.p.	Variation: 2013 to 2012, %, (+,-), p.p.
relation to national average, %	44.31	53.06	52.19	7.88	-0.87
absolute variation, Euro	46.42	308.71	337.89	291.47	29.18

** Presented financial numbers are real, inflation is considered (Rosstat, 2014).*
*** Author's recalculation into Euro based on (Central Bank of the Russian Federation, 2014).*
Source: Author's development based on (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014; Rosstat, 2014; Central Bank of the Russian Federation, 2014).

As to the income-subsistence ratio itself, it increased over the referred period. In the majority of regions the per capita disposable income of rural households excesses the level of the subsistence minimum at least twofold. Leaders are Moscow Oblast (threefold), Belgorod Oblast (3.4 times), and Leningradskaya Oblast (3.8 times). Outsiders are Republic of Dagestan, Republic of Chechnya, and Republic of Tyva.

Total number of people living below the poverty line was 15.6 mln in 2012; share of those people in total population was 10.9% (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014). Over 2000-2012 number of people with income below the minimum subsistence level decreased almost threefold. Rural people amount to 40.4% of all Russia's population living below the poverty line (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5. Share of population living below the poverty line in Russia in 2000-2013, %.



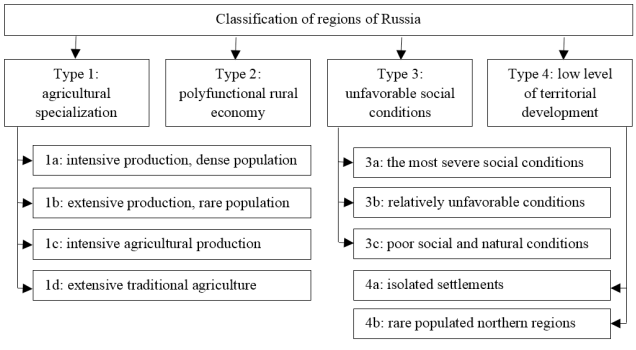
Source: Author's development based on (State Council of the Russian Federation, 2014)

Considering the existing essential differences between regions of Russia in the sphere of rural development, social and demographic potential, development of infrastructure, employment, income levels, and natural conditions, it is worthwhile to group the regions by types. Based on the works of Merzlov and other researches (Merzlov, Ovchintseva and Popova, 2012; Merzlov et al, 2012) and own calculations of seven parameters for 83 regions of Russia, authors grouped 83 regions of Russia into four types and nine subtypes depending on the character of rural development, utilization of available agricultural and environmental resources, level of social and demographic development, and threats to sustainable development of rural areas (Figure 6).

Regions of Type 1 are the major agricultural and rural zones of the country. They have predominantly agricultural specialization of their rural territories and favorable natural, environmental, and social conditions of sustainable rural development. Those regions, while accommodating 18% of Russia's territory, amount to 64% of total rural population of the country and about 60% of the national gross agricultural production.

Type 2 includes regions with diversified rural economy, agricultural production of a suburban type and favorable social conditions. There are only two regions in Russia, which are closely connected to the biggest urban agglomerations of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg (Moscow and Leningrad Oblasts correspondingly). Such proximity conditions strong orientation of agricultural production on urban markets, developed rural infrastructure of a suburban type, high migration attractiveness, growing share of services and non-agricultural activities in rural employment, and intensive utilization of recreational resources. Agricultural production is predominantly concentrated in big agricultural organizations and integrated complexes (Trukhachev and Lescheva, 2010). Potential of sustainable rural development is preconditioned by the highest migration attractiveness of those regions in Russia, opportunity to use urban infrastructures and to get better employments in the cities, proximity of high-capacity urban markets with developed distribution and transport infrastructures. However, those advantages easily pass into threats to sustainable rural development, particularly to land tensions, shortage of natural and environmental landscapes, high pollution, high costs of production because of growing prices for land and labour, and migration of the qualified labor resources to cities.

Figure 6. Classification of regions of Russia on the level of rural development.



Source: Author's development based on (Merzlov, Ovchintseva and Popova, 2012; Merzlov et al, 2012).

Regions of the Type 3 have unfavorable social conditions for the purposes of sustainable rural development and vast zones with attributes of economic and social depression. The major common characteristics of those regions are depopulation and social degradation of rural areas, as well as the growing gaps between living standards in rural and suburban areas. The

regions of Type 3 occupy one fifth of the Russia's territory and provide about one fourth of national gross agricultural production. However, this share in gross production is getting shortened.

The rest of the regions are related to the Type 4. Those are northern and eastern parts of the country with area of 62% of Russia's territory and population of only 6% of total population. The regions are not heavily involved in agricultural production, and their impact into the national gross agricultural production is very small. Subtype 4a includes regions of northern part of Russia and Far East. Rural people in those regions are employed in forestry and mining. Agricultural production is supported by regional and federal budgets. Bankruptcy of forest-industry enterprises, high unemployment and migration outflow create serious threats to development of rural areas.

The map of regions of Russia on the level of their rural development is presented on Figure 7. Regions of Type 1 ("Agricultural") are those of the Central European part of Russia, Northern Causasus, and Western Ural. Type 2 ("Polyfunctional") includes two regions of the largest Russia's urban agglomerations: Moscow and Leningradskaya Oblasts. Regions of Northern and Eastern Ural, Southern Siberia and Southern Far East are included into the Type 3 ("Unfavorable"). The remaining part of Russia's regions (Northern and Eastern Siberia, Northern Far East) has rather severe conditions for agricultural production.

Figure 7. Map of Russia's regions on the level of rural development

Source: Author's development

Regions of the Type 1 are characterized by the growing role of agricultural production in rural development (upon condition of modernization of traditional agricultural production). In order to ensure sustainable rural development in those regions it is necessary to promote introduction of innovation into agriculture, diversification of rural economy, infrastructural development of rural areas, and alternative sources of income for rural people, including in the areas, not related to agriculture.

Regions of the Type 2 are characterized by the highest convergence of rural and urban areas, outrunning growth of services and recreation up to supersession of traditional agricultural activities, and absorption of labour resources by urban and suburban areas.

Group 3 includes regions with the severest economic and social depression of rural areas. The biggest constraints of sustainable development of rural areas in those regions are shortage of labour resources and underdeveloped infrastructure.

Regions of the Type 4, occupying the biggest territory, have the smallest share in total rural population and national gross agricultural production. Those regions are very rarely inhabited, and are very risky for any kind of agricultural production, except traditional hunting, fishing and animal breeding of local ethnic groups.

Conclusions

The above presented classification, however, still does not reflect the whole range of differences between rural areas in Russia. Internal regional differences are sometimes even stronger, than the interregional ones. That very much depends on a number of factors, including economic, social, environmental, geographic, historic, cultural, and ethnographic. That is why elaboration of strategic directions of rural development and related state and regional policies has to consider both existing interregional differences and internal identities of every district and even settlement.

As our analysis shows, many Russian experts (Lavrukhina, 2013; Lescheva, 2008; Bondarenko, 2011; Erokhin, Ivolga, 2012) acknowledge the systemic crisis in agriculture, which is partly a result of economic reforms, occurred in Russia in 1990-2000s, partly a consequence of global tendencies of growing population and issues of food security. Those issues stipulate increasing attention to rural territories as a source of agricultural commodities and food. However, current situation cannot be changed at once. Attractiveness of rural areas and effectiveness of agricultural production cannot be increased with just a bigger amount of investments. Rural way of life is a social paradigm, which is developed under an influence of a whole set of non-economic factors: social, cultural, historical, ethnic, etc.

Classification of regions on the level of rural development is necessary in order to determine priority zones for development and directions of support. Permanent structural shifts in rural employment and drain of skilled labour resources from rural areas call for diversification of rural economy, support of small and medium businesses, development of cooperation of farmers and integration of big agricultural producers, and promotion of non-agricultural job alternatives in rural areas (tourism, services, etc.).

The set of measures to be considered by the next Rural Development Strategy 2030 includes implementation of rural development issues into the national and regional development strategies; consideration of tasks of sustainable rural development in the rural area planning schemes; improvement of rural infrastructure, including transport and communications; analysis of environmental problems and existing threats to sustainable environmental development; elaboration of measures to secure biodiversity; expand special support measures, such as for young people and families, in order to retain them in rural areas; increase of investment attractiveness of rural areas in

general and rural settlements in particular as local centers of rural development.

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